Hardships to Common People in Passport Offices

†*70. SHRI P. K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that common people are facing many hardships in passport offices of the country ?

(b) if so, whether C.B.I, has filed chargesheet against 14 touts operating in the Passport Offices in Delhi; and

(c) if so, the measures being proposed by Government to keep a check on such activities ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The Government are aware that the applicants at times face some delay in issuance of passports.

(b) CBI had apprehended 14 touts on 28-5-1999. Out of this, 10 persons have been charge-sheeted by CBI. CBI also recommended regular Departmental Action against one Peon of the Passport Office. Departmental Action against the Peon is in progress. No action could be taken by the CBI against the other three persons for want of evidence.

(c) The Passport Officer and other officers go on rounds of the Passport Office premises to check the presence of touts or unauthorised agents. To eliminate the menace of unauthorised agents or touts, recognised travel agents have been authorised to submit applications for passport related services. In addition, facilitation counters have been introduced in some passport offices where Ex-Serviecemen's Associations have been permitted to assist applicants in filling of passport applications at nominal iee. Police Authorities have also been approached to curb the actitivies of such touts/unauthorised agents.

The Government have introduced wide ranging reforms including decentralisation of acceptance of passport applications at district level and selected Speed Post Centres. These reforms will curb the activities of touts.

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†Original Notice of the question was received in Hindi.